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ABSTRACT

Challenging behaviors range from disobedience to outright physical violence in the school setting. A variety of different terms are used to describe these behaviors, including "antisocial behavior, aggression, bad behavior, difficult behavior, and problem behavior." The term "challenging behavior" was chosen for this paper because not only is the child challenging the authority of the school and/or teacher, but also because dealing with the behavior is challenging for educators. The paper will discuss what is known about challenging behaviors, why they occur, and some strategies for dealing with them. It notes that the American Psychological Association suggests that three research priorities should be addressed: research on school environment factors known to increase aggression and violence; the development and evaluation of programs that would help children resist violence; and the development and evaluation of programs to teach children and families critical television viewing skills. (Contains 26 references.) (NKA)

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Challenging Behaviors in School

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Challenging Behaviors in School

A six-year-old child attends first grade at an elementary school in Maine. One day, he is working one-on-one with his teacher, and as she is reading a story with him, he stabs her palm with a pencil.

Another child is waiting in the office of his school to speak with the principal. The child brings an otherwise calm and collected secretary to tears and anger with a graphically sexual and violent verbal attack.

These stories are true. They happened in Maine schools in the 1996-97 school year. Incidents like these have prompted principals from elementary, middle, and high schools across Maine to call for answers. This paper will discuss what is known about challenging behaviors, why they occur, and some strategies for dealing with them.

What are challenging behaviors?

Challenging behaviors range from disobedience to outright physical violence. A variety of different terms are used to describe these behaviors, including: *antisocial behavior*, *aggression*, *bad behavior*, *difficult behavior*, and *problem behavior*. Outright violence is an extreme form of challenging behavior. The term "challenging behavior" was chosen for this paper because not only is the child challenging the authority of the school and/or teacher, but also because dealing with the behavior is challenging for educators.

Challenging behavior not only impacts educators, but other students in the school and the larger community as well. In Maine, a survey was taken of risky behavior among youth (Murphy, Walker, & Dennen, 1995). Three out of ten students reported that they had personal property deliberately damaged or stolen at school, and thirty percent of students were in a physical fight during the 12 months prior to the survey.

Researchers agree that challenging behaviors have multiple causes and that in most cases the patterns of behavior are learned very early in life, usually well before children begin school. Nevertheless, it is usually the school that is left to deal with the child and the behavior.

Why does challenging behavior occur?

Predisposition. A small percentage of children are predisposed to aggressive behavior. This tendency may be genetic, or it may be due to the child's prenatal environment or to other chemical or biological factors early in the child's development. Children who are predisposed to be aggressive may display aggressive acts as early as 5-7 months old as a reaction to frustration. As they grow, they become aggressive children and aggressive teenagers, and, without intervention, they are likely to become antisocial and criminal adults.

By the time an aggressive child is in preschool, his or her symptoms can include "extreme tantrums and aggressiveness, chronic non-compliance, argumentativeness and stubbornness, intense reactions to limit setting, and immature expression and control of emotions" (Landy & Peters, 1992, p. 2). These children have a lower tolerance for negative emotions, which makes them angry and often noncompliant. Previous violent acts, cruelty to animals, and pyromania are reliable early predictors of violent behavior (Guetzloe, 1995). Although nearly all children who display severe antisocial behavior have passed through earlier stages of problem behavior, not all children who display milder forms of problem behavior will develop more severe behaviors (Patterson, 1992).

Age. Across many populations, the crime rate is highest among youth in their teenage years. Aggressive behavior is sometimes displayed by teenagers who previously did not act out

(Van Acker, 1995). Between 20% and 40% of males and 4% to 15% of females report being involved in one or more serious acts of violence during adolescence.

However, some researchers maintain that, although crime is dramatically higher among adolescents and adults in their early twenties than it is among the rest of the population, this phenomenon is not the result of an increase in the *number of antisocial adolescents*. Rather, it represents an increase in frequency of behaviors among those who are already antisocial (Patterson, 1992).

Disorder. James Q. Wilson's classic argument that disorder leads to violence is applied to the school context by Toby (1993/1994). He writes that when school authorities do not appear to be in control of the school, small incidents become larger and more violent. For example, punching a teacher is just a more severe form of verbal abuse of the teacher. Either is an offense against school order.

> [A]t some point in the deterioration process, students get the impression that the perpetrators of violent behavior will not be detected or, if detected, will not be punished. When this happens, the school is out of control. (Toby, 1993/1994, p 8)

The separation of school and community contribute to school disorder. When parents are far away, unaware of how their children are behaving, control is more difficult. The structure of a modern school brings large numbers of children and/or teenagers together with no existing community or societal authority other than the teachers and administrators. This leads to difficult situations.

Toby notes that extending civil rights to children, although it has succeeded in protecting children, has also made discipline more difficult for school officials because the burden of proof now rests on their shoulders. Although he is not in favor of changing the laws that require due

process for disciplining children, he acknowledges that they put administrators and teachers in the position of trying to avoid the lengthy process, which may contribute to inconsistent and less frequent discipline.

One barometer of school order in Maine was provided by a survey (Center for Research and Evaluation, 1997) of 7th through 12th graders performed as part of the accreditation process for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Of the over 3,000 students who responded to the survey, only 31% agreed with the statement, "Overall, teachers are well-respected by students," and only 29% agreed that "Overall, administrators are well-respected by students." Forty-two percent (42%) of students agreed that "School rules are enforced fairly."

Frustration/Stress. "Frustration leads to aggression" is a classic tenet of social psychology. Although an oversimplification of the many factors that contribute to aggressive behavior, it holds a lot of truth. Since frustration and stress are circumstances that often lead students to display challenging behaviors, a number of educators (e.g., Guetzloe, 1992; Conroy & Fox, 1994) advocate reducing the demands put on students in an effort to help them maintain control in the classroom.

Guetzloe (1992) writes that anti-social behavior can be prevented by removing its causes or changing the learning environment in such a way that the problem will not occur. For example, if math story problems upset a student, leading him to act out in class, she recommends modifying or changing the assignment.

However, when an educator relieves a student of an unpalatable task because he or she displayed a challenging behavior, this functions as a reward for that child. The child learns how to successfully avoid story problems in math, for example. This action also compounds the problems

of a student who is already at a disadvantage in school (because of the challenging behavior). It sends a clear message to the child: *you don't need to work hard to learn; when an assignment frustrates you, someone will make it easier.*

Toby (1993/1994) notes that the "blurring of the line between disability and misbehavior" (p. 45) is one of the factors that contributes to disorderly schools. Disabilities are treated in our society as afflictions needing treatment. Conversely, misbehaviors are seen as intentionally motivated acts deserving of punishment (Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates, Cohn, & Kidder, 1982). Toby (1993/1994) notes that challenging behaviors are more and more being seen as disabilities rather than misbehaviors. When any transgression is seen as an affliction, rather than a bad deed deserving of punishment, it becomes difficult to enforce rules.

Modeling and Socialization. Early work on the concept of modeling was done by Lorenz (1967), who demonstrated that baby geese form a permanent imprint of the first being they encounter after hatching (which in the wild is usually their mother.) They follow this being around, imitating him or her, so that they can learn how adult geese behave. After a certain age, the behaviors they learned as goslings are fixed.

Human children are socialized in much the same way. They watch and listen to what the adults around them do, and they imitate these behaviors. A parent making dinner in the kitchen as a little one imitates by chopping, mixing, and baking with his or her toys, may be well aware of the phenomenon of modeling, and may be proud when a child shows interest. Child play is an outlet for children to practice behaviors they have observed adults doing. Parents and educators should be aware that children do not discriminate between modeling bad and good behavior, however.

> Suppose a girl listens to her mother plot revenge against a neighbor who slighted her; the girl learns from this example how to retaliate against her own friends. Or what if a boy watches his father get mad because he can't find his car keys and the father releases his frustration by hitting the boy's mother; this model of behavior may become the script the boy follows when he gets angry at his friends. (American Psychological Association Human Capital Initiative, 1996, p. 4)

Children learn by modeling adults and older children in their families, in school, in the community, and on television. The American Psychological Association (APA) writes, "Research has shown that heavy viewing of violence on TV by children increases aggressive behaviors, and those behaviors persist into adulthood." (APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family, 1996, p. v). "Heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the significant causes of violence in society" (APA, 1996, p. 9).

> Research has also clearly established that children's propensities for aggression are robustly correlated with their exposure to violence in the media. Those who watch more violent movies, videos, and TV are more prone to violence... watching violent movies and television shows year after year and listening to brutal lyrics set to throbbing music can change one's attitudes about antisocial, aggressive behavior. In children it can lead to more aggressive behavior and also can evoke unwarranted fears and defensive actions. (APA Human Capital Initiative, 1996, pp. 4-5)

According to some psychologists (e.g., Seppa, 1997), TV violence is glamorized. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of TV programs contained violence in 1996, and 40% of violent incidents were initiated by heroes or characters portrayed as attractive role models for children. Even more than viewing TV violence, experiencing violence in the home as a child "may be the start of lifelong patterns of using violence to exert social control over others and to handle interpersonal conflict." (APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family, 1996, p. 21).

Spanking is a form of punishment that has been accepted by society for centuries, but it, too, is subject to the principle of modeling. The APA writes, "although children who are spanked may learn the expected lessons, they also learn that the people who love them the most have the

right to use physical force as an acceptable way to control behavior." (APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family, 1996, p. 12)

Not only do children learn how to behave aggressively and violently from family and society, but they learn when to do so.

> Research has shown that more aggressive and violent individuals have different ways of processing information and thinking about social situations. They tend to perceive hostility in others when there is no hostility. They tend to be less efficient at thinking of nonviolent ways to solve social disagreements. They tend to be more accepting of aggression and violence in general and think it is acceptable to behave that way... Research has also now shown that, contrary to popular belief, fantasizing about attacking someone makes a real future attack more likely, not less likely. Such fantasies simply serve as cognitive rehearsals for the act. In emotionally charged situations, youth often revert to well-rehearsed, familiar responses, which may turn a conflict into a violent encounter. (APA Human Capital Initiative, pp. 5-6)

Among older children and teenagers, socialization is often accomplished through peer groups, giving parents less opportunity to shape their children's behavior. All children form peer groupings to meet developmental and psychological needs. Some children join peer groups whose values are in direct conflict with values of the child's family or of larger society. Gangs that engage in criminal acts are an example. Joining such a group may be ultimately detrimental to the child's socialization into larger society. It is important to realize, though, that the gang is serving a function for the child in meeting basic developmental needs for acceptance, independence, and socialization.

> Youth are motivated to join gangs to meet the same developmental needs that all youth are seeking - a sense of connection, belonging, and self-definition. In the gang, they hope to find peer friendship, pride, an identity separate from their families, self-esteem enhancement, status, excitement, and the acquisition of resources. (APA, p. 29)

Reactions from society to children joining gangs are not always focused on the real problems in the child's life that led him or her to join the gang. For example, a neglected child

may feel welcome and important in the gang, an abused child may feel safe in the gang, and a poor child may believe the gang will help him or her become financially successful. The problems that should be addressed are neglect, abuse, and poverty, rather than gang membership.

> Waiting until gang activity is undeniable may result in new rules designed to deter certain behaviors ('No wearing purple', 'gestures are prohibited',) without understanding the cultural context of the behaviors. Such rules, such as banning baseball caps or certain colors, will neither significantly reduce school violence nor prepare students for life in a democracy. (Dill & Haberman, 1995, p. 71)

Reinforcement. Another classic psychological principle is that of learning through operant conditioning, with desired behaviors positively reinforced and undesirable behaviors punished. Many parents and educators understand the concepts of reinforcement. When a child does well on something, praising him or her for the action will help him or her understand that the action is valued. When a child does something wrong, either taking away a privilege or delivering a punishment can teach the child that the behavior is not acceptable. However, two problems related to the effective use of reinforcements are unfortunately very common.

The first is the misconception that reinforcement necessarily means punishment. Positive reinforcement (reward) is much more effective than punishment in changing behavior. Additionally, it is usually a much more pleasant experience for the parent or educator, and for the child. Positive reinforcement does not have to be candy, money, or a material reward (which might spring to an adult mind readily.) Praise from a grown-up is often the best positive reinforcement available. And the supply is unlimited.

Another common mistake is the inconsistent use of punishment. A parent who is inconsistent with punishments will not teach the lessons intended, but rather teach the child that *sometimes you can get away with being bad.* Unfortunately, parents who are finding punishment

ineffective with their children are not usually likely to increase their consistency of delivery, but they may be likely to increase the severity of the punishment. This is unfortunate because making the punishment more severe is not effective in reducing unwanted behavior. In fact, harsh discipline is one of the risk factors for aggression and violence.

> Harsh physical punishment for juveniles can increase violent tendencies by fostering alienation, conditioning hostility and fear, and providing models for imitating violence. Research has shown that the ways aggressive youth think about the punishment and rewards they receive and the speed and certainty with which they are delivered are more important in changing their behavior than the magnitude of the rewards and punishments. (APA Human Capital Initiative, p. 8)

Patterson (1992) describes how parents may unwittingly reinforce negative behavior, by either laughing at it or otherwise paying attention or by allowing "escape-conditioning contingencies." The child learns how to use particular behaviors to end intrusions or otherwise unpleasant interactions with family members. The authors write, "this makes it possible for the child to survive in a highly aversive social system" (p. 62).

The relationship between inconsistent and ineffective parenting practices and childhood antisocial behaviors is bidirectional. Ineffective parent monitoring, for example, is strongly related to child antisocial behavior, and the size of this relationship increases over time. (The less parents monitor, the more the child behaves badly, and the more the child behaves badly, the less parents monitor.) The original cause is not clear, but the authors speculate that the two variables probably interact from very early on.

Lack of prosocial skills. Very often, children who display antisocial behaviors have not been taught prosocial skills. "It seems that some families produce children characterized by not one problem, but two: they have antisocial symptoms, and they are socially unskilled" (Patterson, 1992, p. 62). Children learn social skills the way they learn other skills, by watching others, and

by being praised for "good" behavior by adults. A child growing up in a dysfunctional family may have few if any positive role models for social skills.

Alcohol and drug abuse. Alcohol and drug abuse play a role in challenging behaviors. In a survey of Maine youth (University of Maine Substance Abuse Services, 1996), 25% of all 9th to 12th graders in Maine reported that they had been drunk or high in school in the year preceding the survey. However, this survey also found that 85-90% of all 6th to 12th graders reported that they try to do well in school, feel that it is important to get good grades, and want very much to go to college.

Poverty. Poverty is a major risk factor for violence, as well as for child abuse. That there is a connection between poverty and educational success is very clear. It has been described and evidenced by a number of researchers (e.g, Center for Research and Evaluation, 1993; Gable et al., 1997; Guetzloe, 1995; Landy & Peters, 1992).

"Poverty is relative deprivation as well as absolute deprivation. That is, while the lack of food and shelter may be most people's definition of being poor, even people who meet these very basic needs can still suffer from poverty.

> Low-income... children and youth are presented with a television world often quite different from their own. The contrast between the television 'haves' and their own 'have not' status can elicit strong desires in youth eager to share in the consumer products shown in programs and commercials. Furthermore, television often demonstrates how these desirable commodities can be obtained through the use of aggression and violence. (APA, p. 35)

We live in a society that promotes luxury and values property and possessions. People with old but functioning automobiles are bombarded by TV commercials for luxury cars. Not only do these commercials tout the fancy features of these cars, but they send the message that the advertised cars are rewards for hard work, and that good people deserve these rewards. A hard-

working, good person who cannot afford one is left to feel angry and cheated, and these feelings may increase his or her tendency toward violence and aggression.

Complex Combination of Factors. Perhaps most importantly, extreme aggression and violence are now understood to be the result of just the right mix of factors. For a child to become a chronic aggressor, he or she must learn aggressive response patterns, fail to learn prosocial responses, and have aggression elicited by some factor. (Van Acker, 1995)

> Although many believe that violence is the direct, inevitable result of extreme anger or inadequate impulse control, research suggests that inadequate impulse or emotional control puts an individual at risk for violence only if violent acts are that person's preferred response learned through past experiences. (APA, p. 20)

What strategies are successful in dealing with challenging behaviors?

Early Childhood Care. Most researchers acknowledge the damaging effects of improper care of infants and small children. Certainly, not all challenging behaviors can be blamed on parental neglect or mistreatment, but it is an important factor. Babies and young children need a lot of affection, and they need regular routines. The growth period from birth to twelve months of age is when children learn to maintain emotional homeostasis under different conditions. That is, it is important that children have a regular pattern of activities, such as eating, sleeping, and activity, during this time (Landy & Peters, 1992).

It is equally important that babies and small children receive love and attention from their care givers, and witness love and affection around them. Lack of affection, low nurturance, and rejection, especially early in life, are strongly related to aggressive child behavior (Landy & Peters, 1992). It is especially important that care givers model positive behavior for very young children. "[B]etween 18 months and 3 to 4 years of age... [models of behavior] become entrenched, and are after that time more difficult to access and treat" (Landy & Peters, p. 21).

Altering School Structure to Decrease Disorder. Toby (1993/1994) believes that the institutional structure of modern schools contributes to school disorder. He suggests *lowering* the compulsory age for attendance and *raising* the age limit "from 21 to 100." According to his argument, compulsory attendance laws keep children enrolled but do not force them to learn anything or even to attend every day. He notes that in some schools, large numbers of students don't respect the rules or those in authority, yet they are compelled to stay enrolled. He suggests that a youngster who is enrolled but does not show up often or do any work *ought to drop out.* However, he also writes that the laws should allow adults to return as regular day students whenever they choose. Under this system, some adolescents might drop out of school to join the workforce at a young age, but older adults would be welcomed back to learn alongside adolescent students. Toby argues that many discipline problems disappear in the classroom when even one nontraditional age student is present, and that older students are often much more focused and studious.

Early Identification. Children in elementary school who are aggressive and/or violent should be taken very seriously, since these are the children who will most likely become adult offenders (Van Acker, 1995).

> Children who begin to show aggressive behavior early require prompt intervention. The greatest predictor of future violent behavior is a previous history of violence. Without systematic and effective intervention, early aggression commonly will escalate into later violence and broaden into other antisocial behavior. (APA, 1993, p. 5)

Two researchers in the special education field (Foster-Johnson & Dunlap, 1993) note that the context and function of the challenging behavior is important. Generally, they argue, challenging behavior either helps the student 'get something' or 'escape something.' For

example, a student might chew his finger right before the writing section of class because he knows he will be sent to time out and not have to write.

The authors suggest identifying the target behavior, identifying events that are associated with the behavior, and then determining the function of the behavior. This kind of analysis is also called a setting events analysis (Conroy and Fox, 1994). (Setting events are the context within which behavior occurs).

Early Interventions. After appropriate identification and explanation, most researchers stress the need for early intervention. Effective intervention programs for young children whose challenging behaviors arise out of poor social skills should be aimed at helping them learn prosocial behaviors. Some interventions could be aimed at families, since problems may extend beyond the individual child. Among the most promising prevention programs for young children and their families are home visitor programs that include counseling and contact with parents and child in the first few years of life and preschool programs that address the child's ability to make decisions and his or her intellectual, emotional, and social needs (APA, 1993).

Teaching Positive Social Skills. Children can be taught social skills through modeling, as well as with careful explanations from people they trust. Social skills, just like academic skills, need to be taught. If children do not learn them at home, they must learn them at school. A child who has been reinforced for aggression and violence is like a child who has come to believe that 4+4=9 (Van Acker, 1995). Both children have to unlearn an incorrect response before the correct response can be learned. Students who have incorporated aggressive or violent acts as their method of solving social problems no longer think consciously about possible solutions; they always rely on the aggressive tools they have.

> When confronting a student who has aggressed against another, the teacher will often ask him if he can think of alternative solutions. When the student proves capable of generating alternatives, the teacher may assume the student clearly should have known better and she needs only to punish the undesired responses. What the teacher may fail to recognize is that the behavioral pattern of aggression probably required little or no active planning. (Van Acker, 1995, p. 11)

In addition to identifying target skills, Van Acker (1995) notes that it is crucial to provide systematic instruction and practice for students, whether the teacher is teaching arithmetic or prosocial behavior. Children also need to learn why individuals should or should not engage in various behaviors. For example, children should be taught not to hit someone because it will hurt him or her, not because the teacher will deliver punishment.

Children are very curious about how adults behave, and their play reflects this. Children frequently play grown-up, putting on grown up clothes, and practicing appropriate behaviors for the society they see around them. Whenever a child is exposed to a set of values different from his or her parents' or teachers', such as on TV, conversation with a parent or teacher can be very important in helping the child to evaluate the information and develop critical thinking skills.

> The effects of viewing violence on television can be mitigated. Children can be taught 'critical viewing skills' by parents and in schools so that they learn to better interpret what they see on television. For example, children can learn to distinguish between fictional portrayals and factual presentations. In addition, children can be taught to recognize ways in which violence is portrayed unrealistically (e.g., when it is portrayed without any negative consequences). Children can also learn to think about alternatives to the violence portrayed, a strategy that is particularly effective when an adult viewing the violence with the child expresses disapproval of violence as a means of solving problems and then offers alternatives. The availability of such protective measures for some parents, however, does not absolve the film and television industries from their responsibility for reducing the level of violence portrayed on the screen. (APA, p. 35)

Positive Modeling. Dill & Haberman (1995) argue that students who are violent and aggressive in school generally come from environments with limited options and where violence and aggression are the norm. As a result, they say, directive teaching will not be effective with

these students. "Students reward teachers for not making them think by not getting into trouble, students punish teachers for making them think by disrupting class" (p. 70). Activities that are directive (lecturing, checking homework, taking role, punishing non-compliance) limit time for activities in which the teacher can model prosocial behavior.

The authors suggest modeling prosocial behavior, rather than punishing inappropriate behavior. One of the authors shared an incident from her own life as an example. In the course of discussion, she shared with a classroom of students that her child was Korean. A short time later, a 16-year-old 8th grader asked, "Hey, Miss, how's that little egg roll?" The author, "simmering with anger," resisted the urge to publicly humiliate the student and to eject the student from class. Instead, she attempted to respond in a way that expressed her feelings to the student and modeled respect for the offender, while critically examining his or her behavior. "[The response] must derail and deflate escalating hostility, not giving the student and his peers the satisfaction of returned scorn" (p. 70). She requested a meeting with the student after class. In the meeting, she said to the student, "Have you ever been hurt?" He said he had, and she said, "Well, that's how I felt, too. Why did you do that?" "I wanted to show the other guys," he said.

The authors note that behavior modeling is especially important for children who do not see prosocial behavior at home or in the neighborhood. Other punishments typically used with children whose behavior is offensive to educators are not effective in changing the behavior of the offender. The authors note that expulsion and suspension are necessary to keep students from hurting one another. However, these measures will not benefit the punished student or improve his or her behavior over the long term. Corporal punishment is especially ineffective since it actually models the problem behavior. Van Acker (1995) notes that strong aversive consequences

for problem behavior may actually increase students hostility and aggression "as a means of counter-control" (p. 12).

Conflict Resolution Training. Two educational researchers (Johnson & Johnson, 1995) argue that most violence prevention programs in schools do not work. They are ineffective for a number of reasons. First, they do not target the small number of children and adolescents who are responsible for most of the violence. Second, they are too short and involve little if any follow up or evaluation. Third, they address school violence inappropriately because they do not understand the nature and stability of school relationships (e.g., they treat it like street violence, which usually occurs between individuals with short-term interactions with each other). Finally, they are unrealistic about what schools alone can do, often promising too much. These researchers argue that schools should focus on conflict resolution training, a systematic method for teaching kids constructive ways to deal with their own conflicts, as a more effective means of controlling behavior.

Their argument holds that conflicts are not always bad - they are a part of life, and children and adolescents will experience conflicts long after they leave school. Bad conflict management skills frequently lead to aggression and violence only because students have learned to resort to violence when conflict arises. Effective conflict resolution training teaches students to both negotiate (define what they want, describe their feelings, and explain the reasons underlying those wants and feelings) and mediate (stop the hostilities, make sure all parties are committed to the mediation process, facilitate negotiations, and formalize the agreement.)

Students who have completed their conflict resolution training need to have the opportunity to serve as conflict managers for a period of time for the school. The authors' plan

includes having graduates of their conflict resolution training program serve as mediators for other students' conflicts. It is only by applying the skills they learn, the researchers argue, that students begin to change their own behavior regarding how they handle conflicts.

Reinforcement. Gottfredson, Gottfredson, and Hybl (1993) developed and tested, over a 3 year period, a program strongly rooted in the reinforcement model. Its defining features were a behavior tracking system (BTS), which stored information about every positive and negative referral to the office and automatically generated letters to the home and reports for the school, and the consistent use of positive reinforcement.

Implementation of the program failed in three out of six schools for a variety of reasons, including hostility from the teaching staff, change of principal, and "weak leadership" from one school administration. Although data showed that the program achieved some small effects over the three years in terms of classroom order, classroom organization, and rule clarity, these effects were not sustained in all schools, and teacher support was very low across the board. The researchers concluded that the "modest effects ... must be weighed against the effort expended to achieve the outcomes" (p. 209).

Another set of researchers (Gunter, Jack, DePaepe, Reed, & Harrison, 1994) offer a less rigid solution than that of Gottfredson et al., also based on the principles of positive reinforcement. They note that teaching is an interactive process and that, as such, the teacher's behavior is modified by the students just as the students' behavior is modified by the teacher. According to Gunter, et al., "Students exhibiting excessive disruptive and aggressive behaviors are often aversive to teachers; therefore it is likely that teachers engage in behaviors to escape from or avoid these aversive events" (p. 36).

Because teachers want to spend as little time dealing with challenging behaviors as possible, students with challenging behaviors get less attention from teachers and assistants (Gunter, et al., 1994). Also, teachers assign fewer and easier tasks to children with problem behaviors, in an effort to appease and pacify them. When they do occur, interactions between teachers and students who display aggressive behavior are seldom positive. Overall, negative interactions happen much more frequently in the classroom than positive interactions. Gunter et al. (1994) suggest both increasing the rate of praise and increasing positive interactions as well as monitoring students' academic programs closely, to make sure tasks are neither too easy nor too hard. "Increasing the rate of teacher praise, even noncontingently, decreases students' disruptive behaviors" (P. 37).

Effective Partnerships. Of the nearly 1,000 Maine parents who completed the survey in connection with NEASC accreditation (Center for Research and Evaluation, 1997), 53% agreed with the statement "Our schools and community work together to educate children." In addition to programs aimed at directly reducing violence and aggression among children, another important avenue for intervention efforts is that of developing effective partnerships with law enforcement and child services (Warger, 1995). The fact that schools and other societal institutions are interdependent was described clearly by the Center for Research and Evaluation (1993). No amount of school reform will solve the problem of child poverty, although schools are often blamed for problems whose causes originate elsewhere.

Conclusion. Challenging behaviors are a serious problem for schools. They interfere with learning for all students, and they draw teachers' and administrators' time and attention from other important functions. There are many factors that contribute to whether a child will engage

in challenging behaviors, and there have been a number of interventions proposed to address the problem. In addition to implementing the more successful of these interventions in schools where they would be appropriate, additional research at the school level could attempt to address some difficult issues. Small scale, action research would be helpful, even as simple as documentation on a single child. Program evaluation research, to answer questions about the effectiveness of particular programs in particular settings, would also be useful.

The APA acknowledges that schools play a critical role regarding reducing aggression and violence among youth. The APA suggests that three research priorities in particular should be addressed. The first is research on school environment factors known to increase aggression and violence, such as (but not limited to) crowded classrooms, rigid overuse of rules, teacher hostility, and inconsistent treatment of misbehavior. The second is the development and evaluation of programs that would help children resist violence, including helping them resist becoming victims as well as perpetrators. The third suggestion is the development and evaluation of programs to teach children and families critical TV viewing skills.

In addition to work at the school level, universities that prepare people to become educators should play an important role in addressing the needs of future educators to deal with violence and aggression. One set of researchers (Gable, Manning, & Bullock, 1997) recommends the following for teacher education programs:

- Include curricular elements that prepare prospective educators to work with aggressive and violent students,
- Prepare teachers to make instructional and/or environmental modifications for purposes of prevention and intervention,
- Prepare other professionals to serve as resources and on intervention teams,
- Emphasize comprehensive approaches that reflect the complexity of aggression and violence, and
- Emphasize and teach the significance of professional collaboration.

A report written by the Maine Department of Education Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Task Force (1995) notes that children and youth are more often victims of violence than perpetrators. The task force's recommendations state that prevention should be emphasized, and that Maine schools should develop prevention programs and a method of assessing school climate. The report also suggests that Maine schools develop and implement programs on diversity, tolerance, conflict resolution, sexual harassment, peer mediation, and alcohol and drug abuse education. In addition, the task force report notes the importance of effective partnerships between schools, law enforcement, and policy makers. School facilities could even serve as the primary sites for social services and community service programs.

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